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RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
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SUBJECT: THAILAND UPDATE: OCTOBER 5

REF: BANGKOK 6030 (MEETING WITH SURAYUD)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alexander A. Arvizu, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Council for National Security (CNS) Secretary General Winai Phattiyakul told the press that the parliament would have to initiate the lifting of martial law; involving the not-yet-formed parliament could significantly delay the restoration of full civil liberties. An academic advisor to the Council for National Security (CNS) privately expressed concern that a cycle of political retribution could delay a return to democracy, and he said people serving in the interim cabinet might be discredited by virtue of their association with the coup. A former Thaksin cabinet member worried martial law might persist longer than expected, and he predicted the interim administration would lack the political skills to handle vocal interest groups. An outspoken academic critical of interim Prime Minister Surayud's appointment may face lese majeste charges. Two Thai men came to the Embassy on October 4 to present a letter critical of the CNS. End Summary.

CNS SECGEN: PARLIAMENT MUST INITIATE LIFTING MARTIAL LAW

12. (C) CNS Secretary General Winai Phattiyakul told the press on October 4 that the lifting of martial law "has to be initiated by parliament and endorsed by His Majesty the King." This runs counter to post's understanding, which is that the executive branch can initiate the rescission of martial law. Since the CNS has not indicated it is close to selecting the 250 members of the parliament provided for by the interim constitution, and it is unclear when the parliament would begin functioning, a decision by the CNS to rely on the parliament to initiate the lifting of martial law would appear to significantly delay this important move. It also would appear counter to the comment by interim PM Surayud to the Ambassador that martial law could be rescinded around the same time that he forms his cabinet (reftel).

CNS ADVISOR PESSIMISTIC

13. (C) Economic Counselor met October 5 with former Commerce

Minister Narongchai Akrasanee, who serves as a member of the CNS's advisory committee on economic affairs. Narongchai was strikingly pessimistic about the current political environment, noting that deposed Prime Minister Thaksin's opponents seem to be in a vindictive mood. Narongchai worried that Thailand might go through a cycle of recrimination and revenge which would destabilize the political environment and delay a return to democracy. He further worried that the courts might go so far as to dissolve Thai Rak Thai and the Democrat Party, marginalizing much of Thailand's political class. Narongchai said he would like in the future to serve as Commerce Minister, but he did not want to serve in interim PM Surayud's cabinet, because he felt members of the interim administration would be discredited by virtue of their association with the coup.

FORMER TRT MINISTER PREDICTS TROUBLE AHEAD

14. (C) Poloff met October 5 with Suranand Vejjajiva, who held the position of Minister Attached to the Prime Minister's Office until the September 19 coup. Suranand said he foresaw trouble ahead for the Surayud administration, which he predicted would be slow to lift martial law. (He wondered aloud whether martial law would persist for the duration of the interim administration.) He said that the CNS members aimed to destroy Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT), but they had sent private signals that they might not feel compelled to formally dissolve it if defections left it but a hollow shell of its former self. Suranand observed that dissatisfaction of TRT faction leaders with Thaksin was sufficiently well known to the CNS that they might tolerate a regrouping of many TRT figures in a new party, so long as

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Thaksin was not involved.

15. (C) Suranand further predicted that interim Prime Minister Surayud's administration would face difficult times in the next three months, especially if it stacked its cabinet with technocrats and bureaucrats. Suranand predicted that the first challenge would likely come in the form of labor or farmers' groups pressing the government to address specific needs; if the cabinet ministers lacked the political skill to handle these demands, or if the government were to attempt to stifle criticism, then public attention would shift its focus to the non-democratic nature of the interim administration and on the restrictions of civil liberties.

OUTSPOKEN ACADEMIC THREATENED WITH LESE MAJESTE

16. (C) Poloff met October 5 with Giles Ungpakorn, a left-wing activist professor of political science at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University. Ungpakorn assessed the majority outlook among academics and students as "wait and see"; most people were dissatisfied with the fact of military intervention in politics, he said, but most also disliked Thaksin and preferred to see an end to Thailand's political crisis. Ungpakorn believed only a minority -- including himself -- currently qualified as strongly opposed to the CNS and PM Surayud. He said he and like-minded critics probably would be more outspoken if not for the current state of martial law. Nevertheless, he and other activist associates intended to proceed with plans to organize an October 21-23 Thai Social Forum gathering, involving approximately 2,000 people, to discuss political reform at Bangkok's Thammasat University. Ungpakorn intended to proceed with this event irrespective of whether martial law remains in place.

17. (C) Ungpakorn said that, after he publicly denounced Surayud as an illegitimate Prime Minister, he was notified that a lawyer named Chaoyong Rattanawan had pressed the authorities to file lese majeste charges against him. (The lese majeste charge presumably relies on interpreting Ungpakorn's criticism of Surayud as a criticism of the King's

action in appointing him.) He also noted that an official whom he knew in the Special Branch of the Royal Thai Police had contacted him to express concern for Ungpakorn's safety or liberty in the event that he would try to lead protests against the coup. This call might have been an attempt at intimidation, Ungpakorn said. However, the action of greatest concern to him was the authorities' move to shut down Thai access to www.midnightuniv.org, an online academic forum established by Chiang Mai University scholars. Some scholars associated with the website have publicly criticized the interim constitution.

TWO MEN APPEAR AT EMBASSY, PROVIDE LETTER CRITICAL OF COUP

18. (C) On October 4, two Thai men visited the Embassy in order to express political grievances. POL FSN met with the two men; one identified himself as hailing from northeastern Thailand (Isan). The two presented a letter written in awkward English to President Bush dated October 1. The letter requested that the USG "resist dictator committee of Thailand" by denying visas to the new Prime Minister, his cabinet, and to CNS members; it also requested that the USG not conclude international agreements with the interim administration. The letter cited media restrictions and the detention of political figures such as former Thaksin cabinet members (all of whom have since been released by the authorities).

ARVIZU